

Fort Gaines
Dauphin Island, Ala.
Mobile Co.

ALA
HABS No. 16-102
HABS
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49-DAUPI
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey
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Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

ADDENDUM
FOOTNOTES

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HISTORICAL DATA:

Built: Started in 1812, added to in 1848.

Ownership:

1. United States Engineer Office.
2. Confederate States of America.
3. United States Government.
4. City of Mobile.

Present Occupants:

Mr. And Mrs. H. D. Bacon have a twenty year lease of the Fort and about three acres of land. Here, in the officer's quarters of the old Fort Gaines, they have established the Dauphin Island Hotel.

Mr. and Mrs. Bacon expect to gradually excavate and rebuild the old Fort, a part of which they have already accomplished.

Dauphin Island:

Thirty miles south of Mobile, "languidly stretching itself through the sun flecked waters of the Gulf of Mexico, at the mouth of Mobile Bay, colorful, vivid and rich in the romance and legends of the old explorers, lies Dauphin Island."

Americus Vesputius is said to have visited this little Island in 1497. "For two hundred years the Spanish held this island against the attacks of the French, English, Indians and Pirates of the West Indies. They named it Isle de Labe (Island of the Ridge) from the mammoth sand dunes that extend along its southern shores."

In 1699 the French gained possession and called it the Isle de Massacre, "from the great masses of skeletons and human bones they found on landing, and such men as Chateague, Sereigny, Nicholas de LaSalle, Cadillac, Iberville and Bienville came to rule."

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FORT GAINES
Dauphin Island, Alabama

About 1712, Bienville, the French Governor, built a fort which he called Fort Tombigbee, changing, this same year, the name of the Island to that of Dauphin Island.

From 1763 to 1783, the English held this Island. In 1783, the Island went back to Spain. Then in 1812, Dauphin Island was taken by the United States during the War of 1812, because it was said the Spanish sympathized with the English.

Earliest United States Fort:

The earliest fortifications built here seem to have been in 1812. At least this is the date on some old drawings giving the plan of Fort Gaines.

In 1818, or about that time, the present fort was started by the United States Engineer Department. The old fortifications of 1812, seem to have been included in this plan. This work continued until 1821. In 1848, the whole fort seems to have been renovated.

Civil War Period:

The Confederate Government occupied Fort Gaines at the very beginning of the War Between the States, 1861, and held it until the fall of 1864.

Dauphin Island Hotel:

Today Fort Gaines is a part of the Dauphin Island Hotel. In the old officers' quarters we now find visitors quartered.

Source of Material:

Peter A. Brannon, Curator of the Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

Peter Hamilton, Colonial Mobile, 1910, page 166.
Thomas M. Owen, History of Alabama, 1921, page 640.
United States Statutes at Large, Vol. 36, page 1350.
Hay, United States Military Reservations, Cemeteries and Military Parks, 1916.

Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.

FORT GAINES
Dauphin Island,
Mobile County, Alabama.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Apart from its historic interest, this Fort is very unique in many ways. While it was not built by the French, it is, strictly speaking, French military architecture in plan and design.

The five brick bastions are perhaps the most interesting feature of the whole Fort. It is of interest that on the interior of the bastions there are cross vaults of different sizes in a row. Owing to the difference in spans, some of the brick courses run at an angle or slant as may be seen in the photographs.

Other distinguishing features of this Fort are the built-in bake ovens, the smithy, officers' quarters with adjacent court yard, and a very interesting drainage system.

Source of Material:

E. Walter Burkhardt, District Administrator, HABS.
Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama.

(Revised, HABS Headquarters,
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~~in field notebook.~~)

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PHOTOCOPY

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National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.